

# News needs change

By Peter Cogswell  
Emerald Reporter

Newspapers will play a greater role in people's lives in the future than they do now, said Jay Harris, vice president of operations and assistant to the President of Knight-Ridder, Inc.



Jay Harris

Harris was the guest speaker in the 15th Annual Ruhl Lecture held Tuesday, in memory of Robert Ruhl, longtime editor and publisher of the *Medford Mail Tribune*. Harris' speech was entitled "Change, Traditional Values and Continuing Responsibilities."

Newspapers are currently in a downward slide that will end through fundamental changes, Harris said. If these changes are made, newspapers will prosper in the future.

Harris attributed this downward slide to several factors, the first and foremost of these being an expanded role of television in reporting news to the public.

"CNN (the Cable News Network) is now a major force in journalism and National Public Radio has turned the dreaded daily commute into a daily information time," he said.

Harris said other problems facing newspapers today include a decrease in the number of daily publications and a decline in daily readership.

"Vast societal changes contribute to this," Harris said. "Also, the struggle with illiteracy. If people can't read they won't spend much time with a newspaper."

Some of the changes that will have to be made if newspapers are to end this downward trend and enter into an age of prosperity include no longer reporting as the first or primary source of news and making sure not to

write more than is necessary on certain stories, Harris said.

"One thing that has changed is that newspapers are no longer the first or primary source of news, but many of them still report as if they are," he said. "Newspapers need to devote more space to the why of the news."

"Too many editors do not edit," he said. "Newspapers need more color and need to become more interesting."

Harris said that it will also be important for newspapers to reach out for the news in the future, especially to minorities.

"The face of America is changing and newspapers must reach out to the new America," Harris said. "Minorities must be represented."

"Today, minorities are assuming leadership roles in business and government. They are the cornerstone of the future of America."

Harris said coverage of minorities has left something to be desired in the past and that in light of growing racial tensions it will be interesting to see how the media reacts.

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